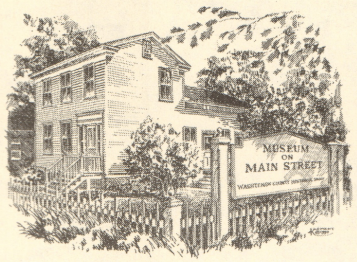

IMPRESSIONS

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER • MARCH 2005

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INFORMATION

Published Seven Times A Year From September-May.

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Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3336

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Email: wchs-500@ameritech.net
Web Site:
www.washtenawhistory.org

Annual dues: January-December individual, $15; couple/family $25; student or senior (60+) $10; senior couple $19; business/association $50; patron $100.

ALICE CERNIGLIA

Michigan Territory Washtenaw County 1805-1836

2005 marks the 200-year anniversary of the formation of Michigan as a territory. Michigan Territory had few settlers by 1820. From 1610 until 1763, the territory was claimed, or governed by the French. It was then ceded to England, and in 1783, at the close of the Revolutionary War, was transferred to the United States. It was part of the Northwest Territory until 1802, when by act of Congress, this area became a part of the Territory of Indiana. In 1805, the Territory of Michigan was created from that part of the Indiana Territory north of a line drawn east from the south shore of Lake Michigan to Lake Erie.

Artifacts: spinning wheel and yarn winder (1803); clothing and home spun linens; barn pulleys, flatware, and farm utensils. ***Photo: Judith Chrisman***

Many Indian tribes inhabited Michigan Territory. In 1809, three French settlers built a log trading post on the west bank of the Huron River near an Indian village (originally Woodruff's Grove, now Ypsilanti.) It was one of the earliest structures built by settlers.

Orange Risdon entered the northwest quarter of what was to become Washtenaw County on August 12, 1824. He surveyed and platted much of this new territory and founded Saline where an old Indian salt trading post once stood. No less than six Indian trails have been discovered leading to this point

Washtenaw County was formed in 1826 from Wayne and Oakland Counties. The name Washtenaw is under dispute. Some think it was the name of an Indian who lived by the mouth of the river. Some think it is a Potawatami word for 'large stream or river'. Noted anthropologist, Emerson Greenman, wrote that it is an Algonquin name that means 'far country' with Detroit being the reference.

This exhibit explores the founding of Washtenaw County and its early settlement. It will run through Sunday, June 5, 2005.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER • JUDY CHRISMAN

Future Goals For Museum

The Board held a brainstorming meeting in February to discuss future goals. The meeting was very successful and we may make it an annual event. When the museum first opened, one of our ideas was to establish a permanent exhibit in one of the rooms. As a result of this meeting, we have now formed a permanent exhibit committee to begin studying the idea and to form a plan.

Continued on page 7.

Michigan Theater
Preserving Tradition Of Excellence

Celebrating 25 years of community support and service as a not-for-profit organization

On Sunday, February 20th, about two dozen persons braved the snow storm to hear Russell Collins give a PowerPoint presentation about the Michigan Theater in the new Screening Room. *The images in the article are courtesy of Russell Collins, Executive Director.*

A History Of Community Service

The Michigan Theater Foundation's success is the direct result of generous community support and dynamic volunteer leadership. Those 25 years have seen:

- Preservation
- Restoration
- Growth into a community center for the arts

Historic Origins

The Michigan Theater's design and practical function comes from three general sources:

- The American "Opera" house theaters.
- Vaudeville theaters.
- The rapid growth of movies as a middle-class entertainment.

Opera House

- From 1865-1900 seemingly every town in America, big and small, built an "Opera House."
- These were community gathering places for performances, meetings, lectures and dances – but rarely if ever was opera performed.
- They were called "Opera Houses" because "Theater" was considered bad and dangerous.

Vaudeville

- Vaudeville was popular in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
- It was a stage entertainment made up of several individual "acts" or presentations by a group of entertainers—acrobats, family acts, musicians, comedians, jugglers, magicians, trained animals, and so forth.

Vaudeville *(continued)*

- Evolved from both British music-hall tradition and, more directly, from "Wild West" barroom-style entertainment.
- Vaudeville was transformed into a respectable family-style by American actor and theater manager **Tony Pastor** in 1881.
- **Benjamin Franklin Keith** and **Edward Franklin Albee**, who were businessmen rather than performers, adopted Pastor's successful approach, called the shows vaudeville to give them a refined, new image, and made vaudeville a big business.
- Keith and Albee staged their first vaudeville show in Boston in 1885 and quickly became great successes with a new approach to show business. First, *they demanded that every performer eliminate anything that might offend anyone*. Performers called the Keith-Albee theaters "the Sunday school circuit."
- *Families flocked to Keith-Albee shows*, which ran continuously from early morning to late at night, allowing patrons to stay as long as they wanted.
- Another major ingredient in the Keith-Albee formula—besides wholesome and continuous fun—was luxury.

- Keith, Albee, and the many promoters who followed their example built palaces for the people. Anyone with 25 cents could feel like an honored guest in an ornate mansion that had uniformed attendants who provided refreshments, escorted people to their seats, and assisted women in lavish powder rooms.

This October 29, 1908 cover of *Keith News* features the four businessmen responsible for the success of Keith vaudeville in Providence.

Early Motion Pictures

- In the first few years of the 20th century, films were shown as part of vaudeville or variety programs, at carnivals and fairgrounds, in lecture halls and churches, and gradually in spaces converted for the exclusive exhibition of movies. Most films ran no longer than 10 to 12 minutes, which reflected the amount of film that could be wound on a standard reel for projection (hence the term *one-reelers*).
- Film exhibition greatly expanded in the United States between 1905 and 1915. One phenomenon was the proliferation of ***nickelodeon*** theaters, converted storefronts in industrial cities that charged 5 cents for admission and attracted working-class audiences. Demand from these theaters increased the volume of film production and the profits for producers, but it also brought forth criticism from reformers concerning unsanitary or unsafe conditions in theaters and immoral subject matter in films.
- D. W. Griffith exemplifies the transformation of motion pictures from one-reelers to an era of Hollywood's worldwide dominance.
- His film techniques served to shape a narrative and Griffith nurtured performers such as Mary Pickford and Lillian Gish and emphasized an intimate, restrained style of acting suitable for camera close-ups.
- Griffith's *Birth of A Nation* was a repugnantly racist, though effective feature film that transformed motion pictures into the form known today.
- Samuel L. Rothapfel was responsible for the appeal of grand movie houses. Rothapfel instituted the practices of low admission – lower than legitimate theaters and big-time vaudeville and unreserved seating.
- Rothapfel, or "Roxy" as he became known to Americans in subsequent years, spoke thus on the secret of his success: "Giving the people what they want is fundamentally and disastrously wrong. The people don't know what they want. They want to be entertained, that's all. Don't give the people what they want—give 'em something better."
- "No palace of Prince or Princess, no mansion of millionaire could offer the same pleasure, delight, and relaxation to those who seek surcease from the work-a-day world than this, the Arcady, where delicate dreams of youth are spun...Here in this Fox dreamcastle, dedicated to the entertainment of all California, is the Utopian Symphony of the Beautiful, attuned to the Cultural and Practical...No King...No Queen...had ever such luxury, such varied array of singing, dancing, talking magic, such complete fulfillment of joy. The power of this Purple we give to you...for your entertainment. You are the monarch while the play is on!"

1928 – A Good Start

During the "roaring twenties," an era of high style and progressive thinking, Detroit architect Maurice Finkel designed a grand silent film theater appropriate for a town with a world-class university. The Michigan Theater, which opened on January 5, 1928, had a fully functioning stage, orchestra pit, and elaborate organ, as well as the capability to project film. It was built, in the words of the architect, as "a Shrine to Art...not built for today only, but constructed in the hopes that it might be a monument for years to come and a credit to the community even when the city is many times its present size."

Michigan Theater *vs.* Vienna Statsoper

The Michigan Theater is designed in a movie palace eclectic style. This style used "cheap" construction methods, like cast plaster decorations hung on a fire proof steel structure, to create the feeling of a grand 18th century European theater or opera house like the Statsoper or Paris Opera.

Michigan Theater *vs.* Atmospheric Movie Palaces

The other general style of the movie palace was the "atmospheric" style. This style frequently created the feeling of being outside in a courtyard. John Eberson was the architect best know for this style of theater design.

MICHIGAN THEATER

A History Of Community Service

1928-1978 – The Butterfield Era

The Butterfield Theatre Corporation operated the Michigan Theater until 1978 as a venue for films and the occasional live event. The company's extensive remodeling of the Michigan in 1956 destroyed the original architectural design of the entire building and diminished its movie palace grandeur. The volunteers who rallied to save the Michigan faced many difficulties. The theater was ill-maintained and its role as a community arts venue was not clearly defined.

1979 – LEADERSHIP

After being abandoned the Michigan Theater Foundation was formed by theater lover ***Henry Aldridge***, philanthropist ***Margaret D. Towsley*** and ***Mayor Louis Belcher*** and other Michigan Theater lovers.

Early 1982 – Restoration Plan Developed

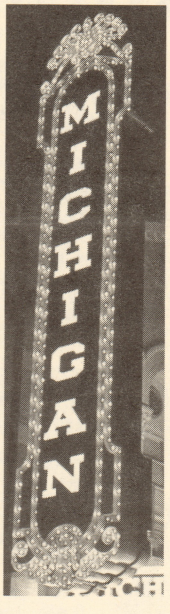
The Board contracted with restoration architect Richard Frank to prepare a rehabilitation plan for the building. After gathering broad community input a three-phase program of restoration and rehabilitation was developed. Phase I culminated in April 1982 with a city-wide appeal for funds that raised $700,000 to pay off the mortgage and make code improvements.

- **Late 1982 – Management Team**. Board hires new management team headed by **Russ Collins** to redefine theater's role in the community.
- **1985 – Restoration Begins**. **Judith Dow Rumelhart** with co-chair **Frank Fike** and her late husband **Robert Alexander** led a $1.8 million Capital Campaign. This dynamically increased the cultural profile.
- **2000 –Restoration Completed**. **Ambassador Ron Weiser** leads hugely successful $6.4 million Fund Raising Campaign. New Screening Room allows expansion of film program.

Success After Over $8 Million Of Restoration & Operational Enhancements

The marquee removed in the mid-1980s

Ann Arbor's Center For The Arts



The Michigan Theater is nationally acclaimed for the superb quality and efficiency of its restoration.

It is the #1 Arts Venue in the area with over 300,000 visitors each year.

The Specialty Film Program that is the envy of every other historic theater in the nation.

The Michigan Theater is more than a great place, it is Ann Arbor's cultural center and has developed into the anchor of our lively downtown.

The Michigan Theater proudly serves as home to the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra, the Ann Arbor Film Festival, and concerts by the University Musical Society, The Ark, Civic Band, Ann Arbor School for the Performing Arts and a wide array of other community and University of Michigan events.

Film Program

We are committed to presenting the very finest in contemporary filmmaking from around the world. Featuring:

- American Independent
- Classic films
- Foreign language
- Documentary films

Films are exhibited in:

- The historic auditorium
- The State Theatre
- The attached Screening Room

Not Just For Kids

Family-friendly events are a key part of the Theater's programming.

- Theatrical performances
- Family Concerts (in association with the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra)
- Affordably priced for families

Broadway Concert Series

New For The Coming 2005-2006 Season

From the days when vaudeville was a regular part of the program, the stars and songs of Broadway have been featured on our stage. The recent acclaimed productions of *Follies* and *Candide* thrilled audiences and spun the magic of Broadway on the boards of the Michigan.

Celebrating 25 Years Of Service

The Michigan Theater is a story of the triumph of human vision, creativity, and determination prevailing over the bleakness of decline, indifference, and decay.

Considering The Next 25 Years

- Our role in downtown vitality and development
- Programming to the extraordinary standards of our sophisticated arts audience
- Seeking guidance from key community leaders

Preserving A Tradition Of Excellence The Heart Of The City Center

- According to a survey conducted by the U of M for the State Street Area Association, the Michigan Theater is the number one destination in downtown Ann Arbor.
- To assure the continued vitality of Ann Arbor's downtown, we feel it is essential for the Michigan Theater to continue its growth as a dynamic cultural center.

Our Vision

- To make the Michigan Theater's next 25 years as **dynamic and beneficial** for the community as the last 25 years have been.
- To ascend to a top-tier position as a **marquee institution known nationally** for the quality and creativity of our programs.

Goals For The Next 25 Years

MICHIGAN THEATER

- Boost the quality of film and live-event programming to world-class stature.
- Assure that equipment and backstage facilities meet modern digital production and safety standards.
- Build educational and outreach programs for children, youth, minority and senior audiences
- Lay the financial foundation for long-term institutional stability
- The Michigan Theater receives 26% of its budget from contributions. The national average is that 50% of revenue comes from contributions. We are committed to strengthen our funding mix to insure a vibrant future.
- The community has rallied to support the Michigan Theater in the past. However, when we are not involved in a Capital Campaign community contributions lag behind need.
- We receive no taxpayer subsidy, unlike peer venues in the region.
- Our ongoing success was built and continues to depend upon private support from the community.
- The Michigan is a great investment

Program Schedule 2005

Vice president and Program Chair, Ralph Beebe, has planned interesting programs for the coming season. All programs are held the third Sunday of the month at 2:00 PM. The talks are free and open to the public. Members receive a post card prior to each talk with instructions on how to reach the lecture. Light refreshments are served.

SUNDAY, MARCH 20 • 2:00 PM
BENTLEY HISTORICAL LIBRARY
"TOUR of LIBRARY EXPANSION"
1150 BEAL AVE
UM NORTH CAMPUS, ANN ARBOR

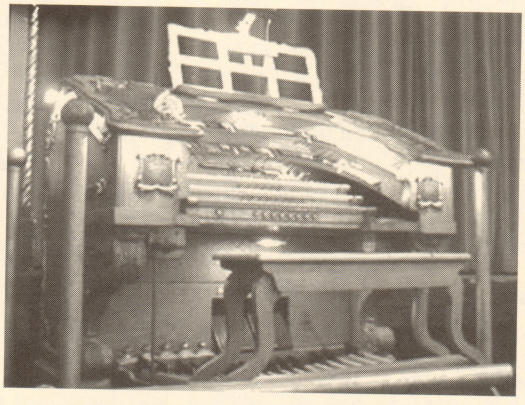
Director, Francis X. Blouin, will describe the work performed to expand the library

SUNDAY, APRIL 17 • 2:00 PM
BROOKHAVEN MANOR
RETIREMENT COMMUNITY
"LOST ANN ARBOR"
401 E OAKBROOK
(near Eisenhower / Briarwood Mall)
ANN ARBOR

Susan Wineberg, newsletter editor emerata and current Board Member of WCHS, will talk about her newly published book, *Lost Ann Arbor*. Susan describes buildings that have been demolished in Ann Arbor.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 18 • 6:00 PM

Our Annual Meeting and Election of Officers will be a pot luck supper at a yet to be determined site.



The Barton Organ was a favorite of theater audiences for more than half a century.

AMY ROSENBERG

Conservation Of A Saddlebag

Orange Risdon's saddlebag, early 1820s. *Photo: Judith Chrisman*

Saddlebags were carried on a horse when people first saw this land. They have existed for many years and have been made in many ways. They were meant to go on a horse's back, usually in pairs, with one bag on each side. Each bag opened on the top.

Orange Risdon used the bag on display as he surveyed many areas of Michigan in 1824 including Saline where he ultimately settled. Born in Vermont, Risdon settled in LeRoy, New York in 1809 and assisted in the platting of Lockport, Brockport and Buffalo, New York.

The bag is made of leather, which can be identified with a microscope. It is probably cow skin and would have been 'vegetable tanned,' by putting it into a tannin-rich soup of water, bark, leaves and/or twigs, if made before 1800. If made after 1800, the tanner would have used a combination of types of tanning baths, in which all kinds of metallic chemicals were added. The skin was split along its length and the surface was consolidated. The opening is along the long side of this bag rather than at the short top. The ends of the bag are sewn with gussets of leather that are sewn with French seams. There is a buckle on a leather strap and a ring. The buckle is iron, as identified by a magnet. It is finely cast and has a thin metal tine on part it. The ring, also iron, is on a footing that is anchored in the bag by being button-holed through all the layers. It is hand-wrought and hammered into shape. The strap and ring appear to have been added later as a repair. Originally, the piece probably had no metal.

The condition of this saddlebag appears to be good. Aside from its original repairs, it appears to be intact. Although stiff in places, it is not misshapen. The stiffness may have been caused by the constant shifting of relative humidity, with seasonal variations. There are some areas of 'red rot,' reddish areas of the leather that are disintegrating. There is not much that can be done with this to turn the 'red rot' around, but it can be arrested if the saddlebag is kept at a steady relative humidity.

Putting a leather dressing on leather is no longer recommended. Leather dressing has been found not to incorporate anything into the leather that will prolong its life and, in some cases, may shorten it.

I would happily consider any questions you may have. You can e-mail to my attention to wchs-500 ameritech.net or write to Amy Rosenberg at the Museum on Main, 500 N. Main St., Ann Arbor, MI, 48104.

INFORMATION • 734.662.9092

Volunteer Opportunities

DOCENTS

Spend an occasional weekend afternoon greeting our guests. Can you spare a Saturday or Sunday afternoon once a week, once a month or once every few months? If so, give us a call.

ASSISTANT MEMBERSHIP CHAIR

We are seeking a person, computer literate, who would like to learn the ins and outs of being an assistant membership chair. The Society has excellent museum-specific software which keeps track of members, donations, thank you notes and mailing labels. The work is somewhat seasonal—greatest the month after the membership letters are sent out in early January. The work must be done at the Museum.

HOUSEKEEPING ANGELS

There must be a person or a team of two that really love making things neat and clean. Our Museum would welcome a team that would come in bi-weekly and spend a couple of hours shining up the place. We would truly appreciate these people.

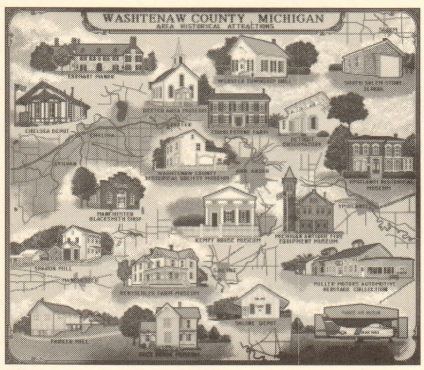
Old Reliable

Our late editor, Alice Ziegler, was very fond of the *Ford Smiles* jokes. One was:

"Old Reliable
The mule, of course, has many faults,
At him the chauffeurs frown;
But ne'er a Ford has to be hired
To haul him back to town."

From "Ford Smiles: All the Best Current Jokes About a Rattling Good Car", gathered by Carleton B. Case, Shrewsbury Publishing Co., Chicago, 1917

Historical Gift Suggestions



The Washtenaw County Historical Society has a few. The throws are $50 each and are available at the Museum on Main Street and from other historical society groups in Washtenaw County.

These throws are woven in North Carolina of 100% cotton and are 60 inches by 50 inches. There are 19 images of buildings of groups that are members of the Washtenaw County Consortium. Mailing by US Priority Mail is available for $8.00 each. For additional information: 734 / 662-9092.

Our Museum Shop has many interesting items available for purchase:

- Post cards
- Tiny hand-made bells
- Note cards
- Ornaments

A variety of books, some of which are:

- *ANN ARBOR IN THE 19TH CENTURY*. by Grace Shackman A pictorial history of Ann Arbor. 128 pp. $20
- *ANN ARBOR IN THE 20TH CENTURY*. by Grace Shackman A pictorial history of Ann Arbor. 128 pp. $20
- *BIRDSEYE MAP OF ANN ARBOR, MI-1880*. 24 by 30 in. Rolled & in tube. $10
- *HISTORIC BUILDINGS: Ann Arbor, MI*. by Marjorie Reade & Susan Wineberg. 232 pp. $15
- *LOST ANN ARBOR*: by Susan Wineberg. Buildings that have been demolished. 128 pp. $20
- *SALINE: A Pictorial history*. By Susan Kosky. 128 pp $20
- *THE INDIANS OF WASHTENAW COUNTY, MI*. 1927 by W. B. Hinsdale. 68 pp. $7

Cobblestone Farm Is Open!

Even if the City of Ann Arbor is forced to slash its Community Services Area budget, as reported in the March 4, 2005 *Ann Arbor News*, the nonprofit Cobblestone Farm Association is pleased to announce the resumption of regular summer hours for 2005.

Cobblestone Farm will be open for guided tours the 4th Saturday of each month from May through August from 10-1. Admission is $2 for children and adults, $6 for families (3 and under free). Parking for the site is through the Buhr Park entrance.

2781 Packard Rd., Ann Arbor.

For questions or for group tours (by appointment year round), please call 734/ 434-4753 or 734/994-2928.

Cobblestone Farm is an 1844 Classic Revival farmhouse, complete with resident goats, sheep and chickens. Benajah Ticknor, a U.S. Naval surgeon, and Heman Ticknor, Whig Politician and farmer, shared occupancy of this stone structure with their families. Being restored and interpreted to reflect its mid-nineteenth century appearance, the farm provides a view of past rural life in Washtenaw County. Today the site is administered through the Ann Arbor Department of Parks and Recreation in a partnership with the Cobblestone Farm Association.

Not Fit To Print

"A little school girl who was required to write an essay, not exceeding 250 words, on the subject of automobiles, wrote as follows:

'My uncle bought a Ford. He was riding in the country and it balked in going up a hill. My uncle tried to make it go, but couldn't, although he spoiled a $25 suit trying. I guess this is about fifty words. The other two hundred words are what my uncle said as he was walking back to town, but they are not fit to write down."

From "Ford Smiles: All the Best Current Jokes About a Rattling Good Car", gathered by Carleton B. Case, Shrewsbury Publishing Co., Chicago, 1917

MUSEUM ON MAIN STREET
A Museum Of County Life

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Post Office Box 3336
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106-3336

OPEN HOUSE
MICHIGAN TERRITORY: 1805-1836
Saturday & Sunday, April 2 & 3 2005
Noon – 4 PM
All Invited -- Refreshments

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Ann Arbor, MI
Permit No. 96

SUNDAY • 2 PM
APRIL 17, 2005

"LOST ANN ARBOR"

SPEAKER
SUSAN WINEBERG

BROOKHAVEN MANOR
RETIREMENT COMMUNITY
401 OAKBROOK • ANN ARBOR

MEMBER 2005
NANCY KROHN
905 ROBIN RD
ANN ARBOR MI 48103-3008

PRESIDENT'S LETTER • JUDY CHRISMAN

Future Goals For Museum

Continued from page 7.

Another idea that came out of the meeting is to establish a small study center where guests can come to do research and make use of the research materials our Museum Director compiles for each exhibit. The center would have specific hours once a week.

As collections manager, I truly became aware of how wonderful our new storage is when we put in the new exhibit. We were able to go to the basement and immediately pull out many of the items needed. For the bigger items stored offsite, we were able to drive to the new site, load the van (without having to carry anything down stairs) and head back to the museum in the time it would have taken just to arrive at the old Willow Run site. We did not have to freeze our fingers or move a lot of things to get what we wanted. We are truly grateful for our new storage both here at the museum and especially at the offsite location.

We keep hearing that spring is just around the corner. It must be true because our Master Gardener, Iris Gruhl, is already beginning to make plans for the garden. We will be ready for the spring cleanup as soon as we can see the ground.

In spite of Mother Nature, we had just enough members present at our February general meeting at the Michigan Theater to vote on the bylaws change making the *Impressions* editor a non-elected member. Hopefully, this will give us more flexibility in our search.

Mission Statement

The purpose of the Washtenaw County Historical Society is to foster interest in and to elucidate the history of Washtenaw County from the time of the original inhabitants to the present. Its mission shall be to carry out the mandate as stated through the preservation and presentation of artifacts and information by exhibit, assembly, and publication. And to teach, especially our youth, the facts, value and the uses of Washtenaw County history through exhibits in museums and classrooms, classes, tours to historical places, and other educational activities.